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THOMAS ASHE'S TRAVELS

In a recent article, by the writer of this note, in the *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW* ("Critical Evaluation of the Sources for Western History"¹) the reliability of Thomas Ashe's *Travels* was incidentally called in question. Since the publication of this article my attention has been called to some contemporary evidence on the subject of Ashe's reliability. The document which is appended is copied from the Worsley papers in the Draper Collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Worsley was editor of the *Lexington* [Kentucky] *Reporter* from 1807-1819. His papers consist of "copy" for the *Reporter*, personal letters, news from the seat of war, and in short the usual accumulation of a prominent newspaper editor's desk. The present document bears no date; from its opening sentence, taken in conjunction with the fact that Ashe's *Travels* appeared in London in 1808, the guess may be hazarded that it was written about the year 1810. The latter part of the communication does not refer to Ashe, yet it is of some interest as reflecting the impatient attitude of the educated Kentuckian of a century ago toward such a purely cultural subject as the study of antiquity.

MILO M. QUAIFE

FOR THE REPORTER.

PROFESSOR BARTON — ASHE'S CATACOMB OF
MUMMIES — & THE CAPEACHY CITIES.

[Draper Mss., 8CC139]

The people of Lexington were amused some twelve months since with the travels of Mr. Thomas Ashe, which were introduced to their notice by that celebrated antiquarian, doctor Barton² of Philadelphia. Having never heard of the "catacomb of mummies"³ they were surprised at the credulity of the very learned professor; and the more so, because he had written a book upon the antiquities of America, & should have known better. — His intercourse with Volney and other travellers who had visited Lexington, who would doubtless in their conversations with him have noticed such a catacomb if it had any real existence, should have been

¹ *Ante*, 167.

² Dr. William S. Barton of Philadelphia, 1766-1815. He became professor of natural history and botany in the Philadelphia Medical College in 1789, and in 1813 succeeded to the professorship made vacant by the death of Dr. Benjamin Rush. A critical estimate of his career is contained in *The Portfolio* for April, 1816.

³ Ashe's account of the catacomb of mummies is contained in his twenty-second letter.

conclusive in forming his opinion on the subject. We felt no resentment against the Traveller on account of his slanders. He was "labouring in his vocation," writing a book for sale, to catch the pence of the credulous, indifferent whether he published truths or falsehoods, and perhaps like Moore & Weld, expecting a pension from the British government as a reward for abusing the Yankey rebels. But we were surprised that the learned professor of the Philadelphia College who had made the antiquities of his own country his particular study, should have made such ridiculous tales as those of Ashe the subject of a formal publick enquiry, and then as publickly have failed to contradict them. However, since the publication of his letter in a late Reporter, noticing the "remains of four vast cities in the *province* of Cappeachy,"* no body is surprised that the story about the catacombs, should have taken hold of the professor's imagination. He is considered something like the present contributors to the Gentlemens Magazine, (who write only about old inscriptions on Tombs, old churches and depositories of dead mens bones) as an inquirer after things of no importance to any human being;—as a credulous good easy man of much reading & but little common sense.⁴ No question but some other "Ashe" has found out his foible and played upon his credulity. For the credit of the literature of our country, we regret, that the professor should suffer himself to be imposed upon so frequently. But as it will only furnish him with some harmless amusement & be attended with no other consequence to any human being, we regret it upon no other account. With a few remarks upon a passage in the doctor's letter, we will dismiss the subject. The doctor says, that "this discovery strangely confirms his idea of the great antiquity of America." Why do not writers express their ideas distinctly? America is certainly "a remain of Ancient times." The rocks & earth of which it is composed are as old no doubt as those of the other portions of the Globe. However the learned doctor however perhaps does not allude to the country, but its population. He should have then have said so. But of what importance is it to the world whether America has been peopled 500 or 5000 years?

A KU KLUX DOCUMENT

The document reproduced below is the so-called "Ritual" of a local secret organization known to its members as "No. 298." This order flourished in the Florida parishes of Louisiana between 1872 and 1877 when the rule of the reconstructionists was at its worst. I am informed that this paper contains all about

* Is there such a Province?

⁴ This is in direct contradiction to the critical estimate of Doctor Barton contained in the sketch in *The Portfolio*. The author of this calls particular attention to his skepticism and incredulity in scientific matters.